

P-Stalina, Svetlana  
see 4.01.2 Twenty  
Letters to a Friend

### *Another view of Stalin*

Svetlana Alliluyeva's *Twenty Letters to a Friend* (Avon, \$1.25) sold 320,000 copies in hardcovers, which, on the presumption that each copy was read by at least two persons, means that 640,000 of us know little more about Svetlana's father, Joseph Stalin, than we knew before we read it. He was distant, cold and cruel to his own family no less than to his enslaved subjects. He drove Svetlana's mother to suicide. When his eldest son attempted suicide and failed, Stalin laughed at his incompetence. He broke up Svetlana's first romance. He jailed his son's wife and jailed or shot nearly all of her relatives. Mrs. Alliluyeva expresses anger but she does not seem very thoroughly aroused. Perhaps her — or her translator's — banal vocabulary accounts for this; perhaps her sensibilities never fully developed; perhaps she simply didn't know her father very well. Once, when he trotted her out to show Winston Churchill that old Bolsheviks were also loving parents, it was the first she had seen of him in months and it was months before she saw him again. "I leave the political analysis to others," she writes and proves the wisdom of her decision with an exception, laying the blame for Stalin on Beria, who knew her father's fears and suspicions and exploited them. Her theory is too simple, and it fails to explain Beria's bloody-handed predecessor, Yezhov. As history the book is pathetic, but in its pathos lies whatever appeal it may have.